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ABSTRACT

In efforts to address child care provider concerns about the staffing crisis, many Smart Start counties in North Carolina are seeking to implement substitute programs to promote release time for child caregivers to return to school or to cover staff illness and leave time. This type of substitute program involves the use of regularly employed, fairly compensated, management supported staff. This brochure describes the major elements of a substitute program, advocating the use of the sponsoring organization approach as the basis in designing a workable program. Following a list of some outcomes of successful substitute programs, the brochure notes that the smaller the partnership, the more challenges must be overcome to create an effective program. Strategies critical to the development of a successful program are listed. Also delineated are recommended qualifications for substitutes and recommended components of the agreement between the sponsoring agency and the child care provider. Other options for providing substitute teachers and child care providers are discussed, including the use of: (1) floaters; (2) substitute pools; and (3) a reimbursement program to attract and maintain qualified substitutes. The brochure identifies the use of substitute pools as the least effective and most costly in the long run. Suggestions are provided for measuring the success of a substitute program. The brochure concludes with information on conducting a needs assessment to determine the local child care community need and commitment to usage. (KB)

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Child Care

PROGRAM SERVICES PAPERS

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL CHILD CARE SUBSTITUTE PROGRAM

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Child Care

Goals

In an effort to address child care provider concerns about the staffing crisis, many Smart Start counties seek to implement substitute programs to promote release time for teachers and home providers to return to school and/or to cover staff illness/leave time. Varied approaches have been attempted, but the ones that remain most viable and provide the most consistency for children and reliability for staff are costly and require community willingness to invest in effective practices for this type of program. What outcomes will a substitute program address? Some outcomes successful programs have achieved include: regular staff will

1) obtain higher levels of education,
2) create more developmentally appropriate learning environments,
3) engage in appropriate teacher-child interactions,
4) be less subject to burnout thereby reducing the county's child care workforce turnover rate.

1) The smaller the partnership the more challenges must be overcome to create an effective program. The following strategies are critical:

- Substitutes should be employees of the sponsoring organization (ccr&r, partnership, community college, center or home, etc) with salary and benefits commensurate with other professional staff
- Hiring substitutes who feel valued for their education and experience and who are supported professionally provides child care programs with high quality substitute care for children
- Well-trained substitutes with early childhood backgrounds can offer in-depth TA to care-givers, and establish mentoring and peer coaching relationships with child care providers in the community
- Substitutes should have a supervisor whose primary focus is on supporting children, teachers, and/or directors so s/he can provide regular guidance, scheduling, and training of substitute personnel. Geographically adjacent partnerships might collaborate to hire one person to direct substitute activities in those counties. Collaboration with the community college early childhood department or ARC Respite Program to provide oversight might be explored.

2) Employ substitutes with the following qualifications:

- AA or BA in Early Childhood or related field
- Working knowledge of developmentally appropriate curriculum & NC licensing regulations
- College coursework in child development theory
- Experience with several age groups
- Exceeds minimum NC licensing regulations - First Aid, CPR, NC Child Care Credential, criminal background check, TB test and physical

3) There needs to be an agreement between the sponsoring agency and the provider that should address:

- the sponsoring agency's responsibilities
- the child care program's responsibilities
- the consequences for non compliance
- the procedures for scheduling and using substitutes
- billing and payment schedule
- written policies on issues such as substitute administration of medication, etc
- written procedures and costs for hiring substitute away from sponsoring organization

By offering a substitute program, with regularly employed, fairly compensated, management supported staff, the program is less likely to suffer from excessive turnover. W.A.G.E.$™ data reported to participating partnerships verifies that turnover is reduced when compensation improves. Teachers in the community can learn from "peers". It is also important to recognize that child care sites can not afford the true cost of hiring a fairly compensated substitute from this type of program (just as parents can not afford the true cost of quality care). Reasonable financial commitment from the child care site ensures in-kind/matching dollars and a way to partially defray costs for the program. These elements are necessary to assure low staff turnover and high quality care within both the child care site and the substitute program.

Other Options

Some variations exist which work in certain locales. It is important to remember that while each county is different, good early childhood practice is consistent. Education and experience of caregivers is vital to a successful **high quality** substitute program. Here are some other substitute activities counties have employed and questions/considerations that need serious attention.

Floaters:

- A county may want to hire a substitute for each center/home — it is important to employ the staff at the sponsoring organization's pay scale rate, under their supervision, and make it clear to the child care program that the substitute staff is "on loan." Using this approach the hiring agency can designate minimal to ideal education and experience requirements, reasonable salary and benefits, and offer support when a substitute has concerns.

- A county may grant a certain amount of money to each center/home for them to individually hire a floater. The up side of this approach is that the children will get to know the substitute well and the site can depend on having an extra person available for field trips, last minute crises, and flexible scheduling. The challenge with this approach is finding and retaining the best staff at less than optimum wages/benefits, education, or experience, depending on what the center compensates its staff. The center would need to train the substitute to work in all classrooms and encourage the sub to enroll in professional development courses. Other concerns might include: a substitute without experience and education who receives minimum wage may not be motivated to stay or perhaps a substitute who works with all children will feel they have no classroom "home" and may be less committed overall.

Substitute Pools:

- These are the least effective and most costly over the long haul. Recruitment and listing of substitutes rarely fills the void and poses many difficulties. In some communities with a low applicant pool, this approach may encourage potential child care teachers to explore their interest and offer directors a "trial" approach with a future potential employee. However, most substitutes are interested in full time work and do not want and can not afford to wait for a call to work. The time spent in training and waiting for results of a criminal background check, with no income, can cause recruited substitutes to rethink their desire to provide services. Good substitutes once ready and available are hired away by centers often desperate to replace staff. Suppose the agency managing the pool spends money to recruit, train, obtain a criminal background check and physical for the substitutes, and provides incentives for the substitute to stay. Both the substitute and the centers/homes must agree to a certain moratorium on hiring away the sub

so that the community, providers and children can benefit from the investment. Will a finders fee be applied to child care sites hiring away the substitute?

- What about education and experience? Training the substitutes on licensing regulations, ages and stages of child development, and what to expect at different sites as well as what their responsibilities will be is imperative. Early childhood courses and the NC Child Care Credential should be part of the training.
- Who pays the substitutes and at what rate? If the center/home pays, different pay rates may apply. Why would a substitute work somewhere that pays minimum wage if another center will pay more? Can the agency managing the pool pay all substitutes the same?
- Will sites be charged a specific amount to access the sub list to help defray the recruitment and training costs?
- Once in the field, who can the substitute go to with questions and concerns? Will the substitutes be left alone with the children? This approach can minimally support quality if a framework is in place to address the above questions and substitutes are required to have a certain level of knowledge before entering a classroom. Without the framework, this approach is not recommended.

Reimbursement Program:

- What happens when a child care site has a reliable substitute that has been with them for years? How can they receive reimbursement for their expenses when they want to continue using a substitute that is familiar to the children? Supporting those child care programs fortunate enough to attract and retain **qualified** substitutes is important. It is imperative that each substitute can step in for a fully functioning staff member by exceeding NC licensing requirements: acquiring First Aid/CPR, NC Child Care Credential, criminal background check, TB test and physical, some early childhood classes or workshops, and working knowledge of developmentally appropriate curriculum and NC licensing regulations. Once these items are achieved and verified, the sponsoring organization could offer a reimbursement plan to the child care program. Reimbursement rates and monthly caps need to be established.

Evaluation

For all programs, documentation of usage and requested usage should be required as well as expected and unexpected outcomes. Evaluation of the program by users and substitutes is a necessity to help determine viability of continuation and possible refinements to the program. How can we measure the success of a substitute program?

- The child care workforce is increasing their level of education by enrolling in and successfully completing the early childhood education certificate/diploma program
- The turnover rate is reduced
- Child care teachers and providers have learned techniques and/or received critical technical assistance from the substitutes
- The demand for substitutes exceeds the hours available
- The children "look forward" to seeing the substitute and the class routine continues smoothly

Frank Porter Graham offers training to local partnerships on program evaluation. Partnerships and direct service providers would find FPG comments insightful and helpful when considering the most appropriate methods to measure this type of program.

In summary, as partnerships wrestle with designing a high quality substitute program, all factors should be considered. It is important to use the sponsoring organization approach as the basis in designing a workable program whenever possible because over time, it has proven most effective by employing high quality, well-educated, experienced teaching professionals as substitutes. Effective practices indicate the best model is one that thoroughly supports high quality care, appropriate compensation, and ties priority usage to child care programs supporting professional development.

Child Care

Statement of Need

Research has proven that stable, reliable, knowledgeable teachers and caregivers provide a socially and emotionally secure, intellectually stimulating, and physically challenging environment for young children.[1] Since this is true for the regular classroom teacher, it would apply to substitute caregivers as well. Therefore it follows that bringing a substitute into the classroom who has less of a background than the regular teacher is counter-productive to quality care. Children depend and thrive on "familiar structure" in their environment as they try to make sense of and create a framework for their world.

In informal conversations, both child care teachers and directors identify the need for substitutes as a necessary support to offering a quality program. High quality substitutes are needed to support regular child care teachers who

1) make use of professional development opportunities

2) tend to have a greater frequency of illness than the average white collar or industrial employee due to the nature of child care work, and

3) without this program, would burn out sooner continuing to cause high turnover.

Before contemplating substitute program development, the Smart Start partnership or ccr&r agency proposing a substitute activity should perform a formal needs assessment, if one has not already been completed, to determine the local child care community need and commitment to usage. Questions might include:

1) How would your center/home benefit from a substitute program?

2) What purpose(s) would you need a sub for?

3) How often might you use a sub, i.e. number of days per week?

4) What qualifications do you think the substitute should have?

5) Do you think your center/home should pay for the substitute? If so, what do you think is an appropriate hourly rate?

Documented need is the most powerful support for developing programs.

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[1] Bryant, Bernier, Taylor, and Maxwell, **The Effects of Smart Start Child Care on Kindergarten Entry Skills,** FPG-UNC Smart Start Evaluation Team, Chapel Hill, NC, June 1998.

Campbell, Frances A. and Ramey, Craig T., "Effects of Early Intervention on Intellectual and Academic Achievement: A Follow-up Study of Children from Low Income Families," **Child Development**, 65, 684-698.

Cost Quality and Outcomes Study, **Cost, Quality and Outcomes in Child Care Centers, Technical Report,** Department of Economics, Center for Research in Economic and Social Policy, University of Colorado at Denver, 1995.

Maxwell, Bryant, and Miller-Johnson, **A Six County Study of the Effects of Smart Start Child Care on Kindergarten Entry Skills**, FPG-UNC Smart Start Evaluation Team, Chapel Hill, NC, September 1999.

For more information:

SMART START TOOL KIT : Promising Practice 20, p. 147-150

Person County CCR&R

Full Time Substitute Teacher Program

Sponsoring Agency: Child Care Services Association, Durham office
Substitute Program, Durham County
Stephanie Tyler Jenkins, 919 403-6950

Floater Programs: Avery Partnership for Children
Substitute Program, Avery County
Kate Gavenus, Executive Director, 828-733-2899

Child Care Services Association, Chapel Hill office
Orange County
Julieilen Simpson-Vos, 919-967-3272

Substitute Pool: Southeastern CCR&R
Columbus County
Lauren Cole, Executive Director, 910-642-8189

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